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Introducing Homer's Odyssey in High School

MAR 22 1961
by ENID OLSON

TEACHER

All day they saunter, docile, to my room,
Fourteen-year-olds, thirty every hour.
These are the speed-sparked boys and girls for whom
I must reanimate the laureates' power.
For them whose eyes are gay with but the thought
Of last night's date or this night's game or yet
The spurt of rockets flaring in the taut
Interstices of midnight star and jet—
For them let me locate the marching words
Of men who vied with gods and would not yield.
I call you, Homer, from your Argive herds.
Summon my youths to your Odysseyan weald.
Minstrel of Greece, enthrall them in your sway:
Don't let them miss antiquity's bright ray.

Have you felt that way, too? You stand at your desk, watching ninth graders enter your room and take their places. They settle themselves and gaze back at you, waiting for the bell to ring.

To make the distant seem near, to open the door to the past—that is often the English teacher's job. In this playlet Mrs. Olson, who teaches at Urbana High School, explains how she helps students to understand the setting, the characters, and the story of the *Odyssey*.

Some are just sitting, waiting for anything to happen. Some are feigning indifference and boredom. Others are waiting for you to look elsewhere so that they can whisper to a neighbor. The rest—and these are the ones who send your heart to your throat—these are looking back at you with clear, steady eyes—eyes that are expectant and hopeful. And then you know deep down inside of you that somehow and surely you must make their time with you worth while.

Yes, you are teaching a class of high school freshmen. You glance at the students' desks and note that they remembered to bring their literature books today (bless them). You know that today you're supposed to begin the study of *The Odyssey* by the ancient blind Greek minstrel, Homer.

You smile as you recall quickly how they groaned when you announced last week that the poetry unit was approaching. You smile even more as you recall how you told them there would be mythology—gods and goddesses, monsters and demons, nymphs and sirens—and there would be heroic adventures that would make the exploits of Superman pale and anemic—and how the youngsters looked askance at each other as much as to say, "Hey, she's really gone off the deep end!"

But here they are, ready for poetry and drama and who knows what. And then you realize that with all your heart you are hoping that you can help them to live for a while in ancient Greece, to sail the Mediterranean and trudge its embracing shores, to meet Odysseus and enjoy him just as much as you enjoyed knowing him when you were young. How can you make those times as real to these young people as they have been in your wanderings in the "realms of gold"?

Perhaps it will work to introduce them first to the aged Ulysses, as Tennyson described him. You can picture for them the old majestic king sitting restless on his throne in Ithaca, still the "sun-bright island," washed by the "wine-dark" waters which daily bring him memories and daily beckon him to sail again.

NARRATOR

"It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Matched with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me."

TEACHER

There is the problem. The new generation in Ithaca were not the only ones who did not know Odysseus. The new generation in America does not know him either. Who is Odysseus, really?

NARRATOR

"I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough
Gleams that untraveled world whose margin fades
Forever and forever when I move."

TEACHER

Your job during the coming days is to give your class the assignments that will help them appreciate the whole background of Odysseus' times as well as the events of his travels. Then perhaps they will know Odysseus through the vivid experiences of his life.

First, you are going to have them visit in their imagination the eastern Mediterranean. So in the next days one class committee prepares the map of Odysseus' journeys.

STUDENT

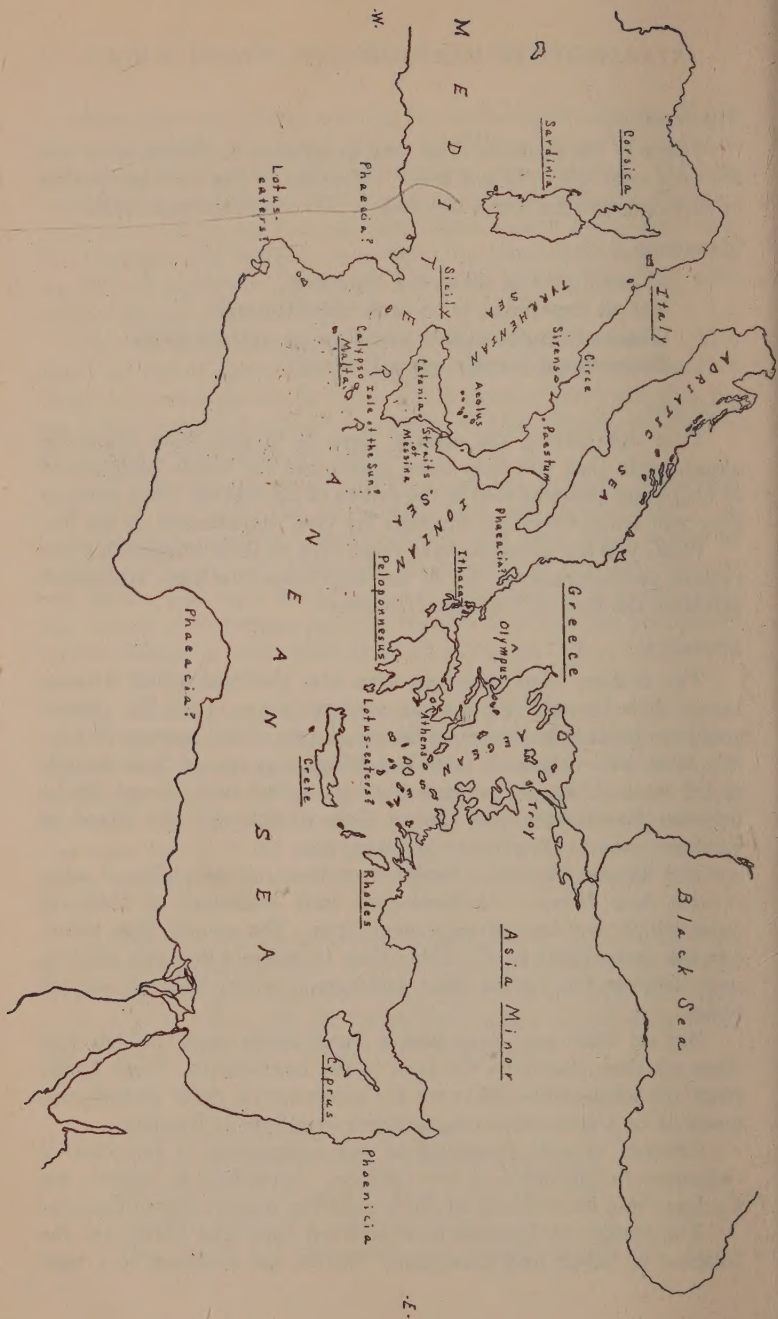
The eastern Mediterranean area was the land which Homer knew. It is thought that for the younger years of his life Homer could see because he described the geography of this area so vividly. We think that Odysseus' island of Ithaca was one of these islands to the west of Greece, perhaps the very island now named Ithake between Kephallenia and central Greece, although the island of Leukas to the north claims Odysseus, also.

The Trojan War was fought over here on the plains of what is now Asia Minor. Archaeologists have excavated at least six cities which may have been ancient Troy. The second, they think, existed about 2000 B. C. Here then is where Odysseus and his men sailed to the Trojan War, and here is where they set sail for home.

But on their way Zeus sent a "wild north wind" which sent them off their course to the land of the lotus-eaters. Some books place the lotus-eaters either on the southeastern point of Peloponnesus or on Crete; others locate them over here in Tunisia.

Another episode described in our assignment is the visit of Odysseus to the home of the Cyclops. According to legend, the Cyclops lived above a bay in Sicily near the present city of Catania.

The Straits of Messina here between Italy and Sicily are the location of Scylla and Charybdis. Scylla, the monster, is a high



crag on the Italian coast; and Charybdis, the whirlpool, is now the movement of the tides off the Sicilian shore.

The Sirens are imagined to have lived up here off the west coast of Italy. One of these islands north of Sicily is supposed to be the home of Aeolus, the god of the winds. Either Malta or Sicily is believed to be the Isle of the Sun-God.

There is another location the authorities are not quite sure of, and that is the home of the Phaeacians, the people who finally helped Odysseus get home. One book says that they may have lived somewhere on the north coast of Africa, either here in Tunisia or here in Libya. Still other authors have placed them north of Ithaca in the Ionian Sea.

TEACHER

Fortunately for your class, there is another teacher in your school who has visited this area. Two of your students invite him to speak to the class. He visits one day and describes his impressions of these lands that still live in history.

NARRATOR

" . . . All times I have enjoyed
Greatly, have suffered greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone; on shore, and when
Through scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vexed the dim sea. . . ."

GUEST TEACHER

I have been privileged to sail on the Mediterranean Sea twice. My memories of its waters and the lands surrounding it are associated with the colors I saw. The waters of the Mediterranean are brighter even than described by Homer or any of the travelers since then. They are an exquisite blue in the sunshine and a clear green on a cloudy day. The waters of the Adriatic Sea are light blue. The Ionian Sea is a deep purple, especially about four o'clock in the afternoon, truly the "wine-dark sea" of Homer's poetry.

Let us begin our journey here in the Tyrrhenian Sea, coming south down the coast of Italy. We'll stop off for a while at a little village south of Naples. The reason we want to stop here is to get a glimpse of Greece while we are still in Italy, sort of a preview of what we shall see in Athens. Many years ago a colony of Greeks settled here and built their town as an almost exact replica of Athens. To simulate the hill of the Acropolis in Athens, these Greeks in Paestum (that's the name of their town) built a plateau of earthworks. They put a temple on top of their

plateau, too. In Athens the temple is Athene's. In Paestum the temple is in honor of Poseidon, god of the sea. Here in this town you can see the main difference between Greek and Italian architecture.

Let us sail on then southward toward Sicily. Sicily is the triangular shaped island off the toe of the Italian boot. It is an island of magnificent mountain scenery, surrounded by blue water, and topped by the silver cone of Mt. Etna.

Between Italy and Sicily are the Straits of Messina, a narrow channel which in ancient times used to frighten mariners as the lair of Scylla and Charybdis, the monsters. The whirlpool is probably seven miles or so from the cliff with its caverns. The danger of the currents used to be intensified by tempests and squalls which sometimes would sweep down from the mountains of Calabria and drive sailing vessels against the rocks. Now the eddy of Charybdis is small threat to modern mechanized ships.

A little way down the east coast of Sicily is the town of Catania. Here is a bay containing seven black rocks which rise out of the water. These are called the Rocks of the Cyclops and are supposed to be the rocks which Polyphemus threw after Odysseus' ship when Odysseus was taunting him after the Greeks' escape.

Shall we go on now to the Ionian islands? I first approached them from the north, coming from Venice down the Adriatic Sea. The Adriatic waters, as I said, were light blue. But as we approached the Ionian Sea, we saw the water turn to a deep purple. Can you see the picture of these islands in the "wine-dark sea," one of which is Ithaca, Odysseus' kingdom? The vegetation is very sparse on these islands. The delicate green rocks around the shore are covered by a wash of green, and climbing up the rocky summits are marble temples, not snowy white as we imagine them, but honey-colored from centuries of weathering.

Another impression you don't believe until you see it for yourself is the color of the air in Greece. Though crystalline clear, it is violet colored. Once you have seen the picture, you never forget it: violet air, honey-colored marble, and purple water.

Now we shall sail aound the peninsula to Athens. Athens is a few miles inland, so first we stop at her port, the Piraeus, a little town that is the gateway to the "glory that was Greece." Then as we proceed inland we see the purple hills of Athens rising into the still violet air. And there lifting into the sky is the Acropolis, that famous hill on which the Parthenon is built—its marble columns honey-colored also. As you probably know, the Parthenon was de-

stroyed less than three hundred years ago in a war between the Turks and the Venetians. The Turks stored their ammunition in this shrine, and during a Venetian bombardment of Athens a shell exploded in the temple, and of course many of its columns fell. Some reconstruction work has been done recently in an attempt to restore the Parthenon to its former perfection.

We'll make one more visit on our Mediterranean journey by traveling northward to Mt. Olympus. In mythology this was the home of the gods, ruled over by Zeus. Eight hundred years before the birth of Christ in actual history the national Greek festival originated here, which we know as the Olympic games. The games continued as a national festival until approximately 1400. They were discontinued then for nearly 1500 years, but in 1896 they were renewed as the first in a series of international athletic contests. Since then they have been held every four years with only a few exceptions in time of war.

TEACHER

Our guest lecture is followed by a colored filmstrip of Athens and its outlying regions. Here, then, is the area where Odysseus lived and roamed. These were the countries he knew—for he traveled far and wide among them.

NARRATOR

" . . . I am become a name ;
For always roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known—cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honored of them all—"

TEACHER

Another student committee then describes the races that peopled these islands and shores.

GIRL STUDENT

The groups of people mentioned in the *Odyssey* are the Achaeans, the Argives, the Trojans, and the Phaeacians. *Achaeans* and *Argives* were names for ancient Greeks. Achaia was a province of Greece, but Homer used the name *Achaeans* to refer to any Greeks. He also used the name *Argives* to refer to all Greeks, although these people came from the city of Argolia.

The Trojans, of course, were the people of Troy. The Phaeacians were people of Phaeacia, an unknown land. Some people think they may have been the Phoenicians although the Phoenicians lived way over here in the Near East.

Other names given to the Greeks in history were *Hellenes*, a name used for all Greeks during the Classical Period, and the *Ionians*, who came from all these islands: Corfu, Leukas, Ithaca, Cephalonia, and Zante. The Dorians came to Greece later and settled in Laconia, now Thessaly, and in Doris in Peloponnesus.

The Athenians were the people of Athens, who named their city after Athene, the goddess of wisdom. The Spartans were from Sparta and were known for their military strength and strict discipline.

Odysseus and his subjects, then, could properly be called Achaeans, or Argives, or Ionians. These islands are called the Ionian islands even today, and their water is the Ionian Sea.

NARRATOR

"Old age hath yet his honor and his toil.
Death closes all; but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods."

TEACHER

The gods of Greece. Here are subjects to fill a course by themselves. But the students can get a nodding acquaintance with them at least, by doing a little research and reporting on them.

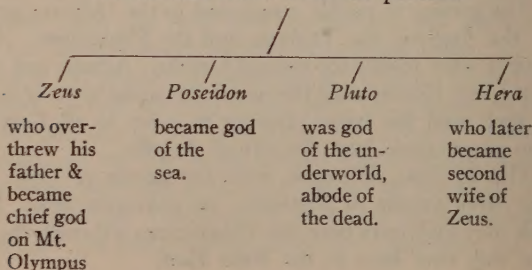
BOY STUDENT

We are going to start our discussion with the god Cronus. The Romans called him Saturn. Cronus was the father of all life and the god of seed-sowing. He married Rhea; and four of their children were Zeus, Poseidon, Pluto, and Hera. Zeus was the same as the Roman Jupiter, Poseidon was Neptune, and Hera was Juno. Therefore, Rhea is called the Mother of the Gods.

We can diagram them like this:

Cronus and Rhea were the parents.

The
children
were:



Homer speaks of the "aegis-wielding Zeus," which refers to the shaggy and tasseled shield which Zeus carried.

BOY STUDENT

Poseidon, the sea god, is represented as carrying a trident, which is a three-pronged spear. He is pictured in a chariot drawn through the water by dolphins, common fish in the Mediterranean. Poseidon married Amphitrite, a sea nymph. They had a son named Triton, who is mentioned in a poem by the English poet, Wordsworth. Another son of Poseidon was Polyphemus, the Cyclops who imprisoned Odysseus and his sailors.

Another god was Hermes, who was the messenger of the gods. We know him better by the Roman name of Mercury, who was known for his speed and was the patron of travelers. He is pictured as having a winged helmet and winged sandals. He conducted the souls of the dead to the lower regions, the underworld.

GIRL STUDENT

Two creatures who were higher than the mortals but lower than the gods were Circe and Calypso.

Circe was an island sorceress who could bewitch people. She was the daughter of the sun and a water goddess. She could turn men into beasts and had turned Scylla into a monster. She warned Odysseus about the Sirens and Scylla and Charybdis. Odysseus and his men lived on her island for a year.

Calypso was a sea nymph who lived on the island of Ogygia. Ogygia is identified with Gozo, the island beside Malta. Calypso loved Odysseus and wanted to marry him so that he could share her immortality. Odysseus remained on her island for seven years, and then Zeus sent orders for him to be released. Calypso stocked his raft with supplies and then is supposed to have died of grief after Odysseus left her forever.

GIRL STUDENT

The last goddess we shall report on is Athene. Homer always describes her as the "bright-eyed goddess" or the "keen-eyed goddess." She was the same as Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom. She was wise in both peace and war. There was a prophecy in mythology that one of Zeus' children would be wiser than he. To prevent this, Zeus took the lives of his children at their birth, but the prophecy came true anyhow when Athene sprang full-grown and fully armed from the head of Zeus.

One story tells us that Poseidon and Athene held a contest to

see who would best win the pleasure of Zeus. Poseidon created the horse, and Athene created the olive tree. Zeus awarded the prize to Athene.

All of these Greek gods were different from our idea of a God. They had the same failings and weaknesses of human beings. Their supposed supernatural powers seem very far-fetched to us. But they were handsome and beautiful and warm with life. The Greeks felt an intimacy with them and prayed to them about their everyday lives. The Greeks erected beautiful statues and temples, celebrated festivals, wrote poems and dramas in honor of their gods and goddesses. And much art and literature in over 2000 years since then have been inspired by the legends surrounding them.

TEACHER

Those then were the deities that interfered with or assisted, plagued or succored, threatened or rescued Odysseus and his men. But is this information so far vivid enough to these youngsters? Can they yet see in their mind's eye what Odysseus' physical world was like? Well, let's make sure. We send some of our young students up to the University campus to visit its classical museum. Here they see the replica in miniature of the Parthenon, Athene's shield, the cup of Nestor, and the model of Odysseus' ship. They come back and draw on the board for their classmates sketches of what they saw.

BOY STUDENT

Among the many relics which we saw in the Classical Museum were coins, gourd-shaped clay lamps, a sacrificial knife, statues of gods and people, fragile books written in Greek, and famous paintings.

There were four things which interested us the most, however. John will sketch them for you while I tell you a little about them.

The first was a scale model of the Parthenon in Athens. This building was erected on a hill or plateau called the Acropolis and was a temple dedicated to Athene. A beautiful gold and ivory statue of Athene stood inside it. The Parthenon was built 500 years before Christ and is called the most perfect example of Greek architecture and, by some, the most beautiful building in the world. It was built of marble and lined with Doric columns. Its symmetrical proportions were worked out mathematically, true even to the inch.

Another object in the museum is the shield of Athene Parth-

enos, the statue in the Parthenon. It is a large round shield of stone, beautifully carved and decorated.

There is a cup in the museum which is made of gold. It is said to resemble the hand-hammered cup of Nestor described by Homer in the *Iliad*. Nestor was a very old man who was the wisest of the Greeks and a counselor during the Trojan War.

What interested us almost more than anything else was a scale model of an early Greek ship, presumably similar to the kind in which Odysseus sailed from Troy. The ship had a wood body, deck, and mast, and wooden oars. The prow consisted of the head of some frightful god or animal to scare away the demons lurking in the deep.

The tiller was at the stern, of course. There were twelve oars, six to a side—an average, I guess, in those days. In the bow was a small hatch giving access to the limited supply space. The crew was always exposed to the weather.

A single cloth sail was attached to the mast with rigging reaching back to the tiller. There may have been several sails on some of the ships.

NARRATOR

“Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; . . .”

TEACHER

Often it helps to supplement these reports with a filmstrip on Greek life, the pictures of which show ruins, statues, and buildings in Greece or now in museums as well as illustrations from excavated urns and other decorated pottery and artifacts.

There is one more detail we must discover: the reason for Odysseus' wanderings. How did he come to sail these seas? Where has he come from? Where is he going?

NARRATOR

“I am
Odysseus, great Laertes' son,
For cunning plans of every kind
Known among men; and even to heaven
Has spread my fame.”

“We are Achaeans come from Troy;
We wander blown by every wind
Over the sea's great gulf, still striving
To reach our homes, yet ever go

On alien ways, by paths we never
Have willed to travel—so it pleases
Zeus to decree.”

“Myself not least, but honored of them all—
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.”

“It may be that the gulfs will wash us down;
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.”¹

TEACHER

And so two students report on the *Iliad*, which precedes the *Odyssey* in time.

GIRL STUDENT

We have read in our earlier school years how the Greeks defeated the Trojans one night by hiding a company of men inside a wooden horse. When the horse was pulled inside of Troy, the Greeks crawled out and surprised the Trojans. This stratagem was Odysseus' idea.

Hector was the hero among the Trojan warriors. He had killed many of the Greek leaders and was singled out for revenge by their surviving friends. One day, after the siege of Troy had gone on some nine years or so, Achilles, the Greek who was half god, and Hector met face to face. Achilles chased Hector in a long and strenuous pursuit. At last they halted and faced each other in personal combat. Athene intervened on the side of Achilles and helped him to kill Hector.

In a spirit of revenge Achilles then tied Hector's body by the feet to his (Achilles') chariot and dragged it round and round the defeated city. But the god Apollo protected Hector's body from mutilation and destruction and later preserved it from decomposing when Achilles refused to return it for burial.

BOY STUDENT

Priam, the aged father of Hector, then decided to go to the Greek camp to beseech Achilles for Hector's body. He brought with him a bountiful ransom of twelve women's robes, twelve cloaks

¹ Selections from the *Odyssey* are taken from the translation by Herbert Bates, copyright 1929 by Harper and Brothers, by permission of the publisher.

of single fold, twelve coverlets, ten talents of gold, two shining tripods, four caldrons, and a prized goblet. Hermes, the messenger of the gods, protected Priam on his entire trip, and Priam was successful in securing the respect of Achilles and the return of his son's body, which he took back to Troy for a state funeral.

We recall that later the Trojan Paris killed Achilles by shooting an arrow into his vulnerable right heel. The Trojan War was finally over, and the Greeks were free to return home, Odysseus and his warriors among them.

TEACHER

Feeling thus steeped in the atmosphere of Odysseus' time, we can then get our notebooks ready. We make our lists of geographical place names, mythical names and places, and the vocabulary words which may give us trouble. We recall our list of poetry terms, such as narrative, epic, rhythm, metaphor, simile, personification, and others which will be illustrated in our selections. We refer to the techniques of the shorter narrative poems we have already studied so that we can look for Homer's devices of staging, characterization, motivation, tension, climax, and denouement. Sometimes a committee likes to compile mythological names found in our society (our speech and ads are full of them) and explain their symbolism and significance.

As a preview of the story itself, we watch the colored film strip of *Ulysses*, made from the screen version of the *Odyssey*. We check identification of characters and settings there against our notebook lists.

We then read the story aloud together and by turns, savoring the words and relishing the hazards.

NARRATOR

“ . . . My mariners,
Souls that have toiled, and wrought, and thought with me—
That ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free foreheads—. . . ”

TEACHER

As the story progresses, the students write themes on such subjects suggested by the story as “The Character of Odysseus” or “Odysseus' Relationship with His Men,” “The Role of the Gods in the Lives of the Greeks” or “The Greek Outlook on Fate,” “Homer's Ancient World” or “The Geography of the Mediterranean Lands,” and “The Reasons for the ‘Detours’.”

In a theme the student combines reference to the events of the epic, his own opinions, and illustrative quotations from Homer. He synthesizes what he has read with what he has thought and learns how to use quoted material. Perhaps some of these young people, too, may begin

"To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought."

And so, days later, we come full circle. We began with the aged Odysseus fretting on his throne. We close our study with Odysseus setting sail—once more

"To sail beyond the sunset, and the paths
Of all the western stars, until I die."

As you, their teacher, look again into your students' eyes, you thrill to see a gleam of admiration and honor and affection as they take leave of Odysseus.

Your 1957-58 Officers

The new president of IATE is Dr. Eugene Waffle of Eastern Illinois State College. Vice-president is Emma Mae Leonhard of Jacksonville. Florence Cook of Shabbona is the new program chairman, and will welcome your suggestions for 1958, as will any of the members of her committee: Margaret Cummings of Mt. Vernon, Robert Gard of Bloom Township High School in Chicago Heights, Mrs. Charlotte Whittaker of Evanston, and Roy Wehshinsky of Carbondale.

Holdover officers include Mrs. Helen Ellis, Rochelle, secretary; Harris Wilson, Urbana, treasurer; and co-editors J. N. Hook, Urbana, and Wilmer Lamar, Decatur.

On Teaching English

VIRGINIA SORESENSEN

Edinboro, Pennsylvania

English is not like other subjects. One is not stuffed with facts in the hope that some of them may ooze at the proper time if one is squeezed a little. A good English teacher does not exist to fill the pages of notebooks. It is his privilege to alter the student himself, so that thereafter wherever he may be, whatever he may study, no matter what he may become, he will be able to receive the best that has been thought and written, and to understand it.

It is a privilege—one of those very rare ones that usually appear only in one's dreams—to return home and have a chance to pay tribute to some of the great teachers who influenced me and inspired me so much here at Brigham Young and in all the years since that time.

When I first thought of coming, it occurred to me with a shock of pleasure that by some freak of Fate my fifth-grade teacher might also be here. If she went on in teaching, she certainly would have been an English teacher, and—who knows? I knew her the very first year she taught, down in Manti, Utah, and by now, if my still shaky arithmetic serves, she would have thirty-four years of service—not unheard-of in the profession.

There is something in any case that I would like to say to her and to you about this teacher that I have never been able to forget. I wonder why. Why should I remember her name—her face—even some of the dresses that she wore? I even remember how sympathetically she dealt with a certain boy who had an overpowering urge to be bothersome, and how, the day she went off forever on the old Sanpete train down in Manti, a delegation of us bearing gifts were amazed to see this boy ride down the street scattering our female delegation every direction as he careened—like a TV cowboy—to the train window, thrust a gift into her hands, and went pelting off again.

This teacher, being my ideal for so long, made me feel comforted about a certain deficiency I had in arithmetic and other sub-

Mrs. Sorensen, author of prize-winning books for children, and the charming wife of the head of the English Department at Edinboro State Teachers College, gave this talk before the Utah Council of Teachers of English. It is reprinted here from the *Utah Bulletin*.

jects. She seemed flustered about these things too. But how she could read! Once she brought her own copy of a huge red book (which we called *Less Miserables*) and gave us the story of the doll, uncut and undigested. Before the year was out I had read the whole book from the library, even the parts that I couldn't comprehend in the least. She read that magnificent Huckleberry Finn, and *you* were Jim—and *you* were Huck, and *you* knew the great river. She made the words so precious you didn't mind learning to spell them, or to define them, or to juggle them in all the ways she insisted that you try to do. Then there was the personal thing that happened. I knew she respected words and thoughts. I had from her that indispensable mysterious excitement and belief in literature that one finds in people like Christopher Morley in his *Parnassus on Wheels*. So you can understand how I felt one momentous day when she paused at my desk and said, "I liked your poem." She told the whole class she wouldn't wonder but that I might grow up to be a writer.

Later on there were other teachers. Not all had the same power, but some of them did; and for me it was engendered forever and could never be lost. Many of you will share my recollections of Professor Karl Young reading English poetry; of Professor P. A. Christensen reading Shakespeare. You'll remember Professor Young's stories of his days at Oxford, which gave much of it point. Much later I understood what he had done for me. It came to me that he was preparing the rest of us to hear the nightingales. Many of you have sat under Professor Christensen and I believe will agree with me that the feeling was special then as it is now. The climate was that same grave respect for literature and the language of which it is made.

Even in a world dominated by the achievements of science it is becoming more and more apparent even to scientists themselves what an important place the humanities fill in human life. We have an obligation taken care of by no other study—no other department. The past is preserved by us. The present is realized through us. And the preservation of our time for the future depends upon us. Remember the proud words of Archibald MacLeish to the men of action: "All you do will be lost without us; remember that. We are the historians. We are the poets and the chroniclers."

Meeting different people in different countries several years ago, I was impressed by the fact that everybody who wanted to see America wanted especially to see the Mississippi River. And this was not because it was a great river dedicated to commerce. There

are many, many great rivers dedicated to commerce. It was because the adventures of that boy named Huckleberry Finn had happened upon it. Such exchanges of sympathies and environments had been going on for a long, long time before a shrinking world made international relations a necessary subject for study and for national effort. Through literature and through composition—a sad, plain word for the first practice of creation in the language—we must make an awareness. Though it seems sometimes too heavy a duty; yet it is ours and will be done by nobody else. As I said earlier, we must alter the student himself so that he may see and hear and experience sensitively and productively.

The most important thing of all is that the literature of the future depends upon us. We are the custodians of that delicate and necessary instrument—the language—without which our time will be lost to the future. I know how easily the heart of the matter is lost in detail—in lesson plans, in correcting themes, in discipline. It's the same way with the raising up of a man. It seems lost day after day in meal-getting and ear-washing the same way in which the making of a book seems lost again and again in a chaos of detail during the long time of writing. Yet students must be given the skeleton, the bare bones of the language, along with the knowledge that here—if I may tinker a bit with Yorick's skull—the lips must later hang: the telling, the singing, and the laughing.

The rules of language are like the rules of human conduct: made with purpose out of long experience. Only once in my career have I departed from this knowledge, some of which I received from the gentlemen here at hand, and I was too ashamed of it to tell Dr. Christensen about it for a long, long time. When I was writing my first novel I wanted to be very modern and free, perhaps a bit in prose like Cummings in verse. As I dispensed with quite a bit of the punctuation, I told myself that without quotation marks, the words of my characters would blend with their environment. The whole would flow without interruption. I will never forget my first interview with my editor in New York, where I had been brought to do some cutting and rewriting—a very exciting time for me because I had never before been east of the Mississippi River. He read one page of the manuscript, emphasizing the confusions in the most masterly way you can imagine, so that within an hour back at my hotel I was hot at the task of restoring order to the chaos of 400 pages of manuscript. I kept a piece of that blotter to remind myself of the day—a tribute to the skills which are not merely chores but part of making and shaping. In writing, these

skills are as necessary as are the ways of brushes and colors in painting, but they must be learned and then forgotten—while inwardly remembered.

In a recent book about Chinese painting, *The Tao—the Way of Life of Painting*, this is beautifully said, and I think it has to do with all of the arts and with all of the skills. "You must learn first to observe the rules faithfully; afterward modify them according to your intelligence and capacity. The end of all method is to seem to have no method. If you aim at facility, work hard; if you aim for simplicity, master complexity." The way of teaching English is like this also: a kind of engendering through the skills to the spirit.

From that first well-remembered teacher to these wonderful men I am privileged now to speak of as my good friends, there was a power to teach without seeming to teach. In this ideal way apprentices learned in the old days, even in the arts, and students may still learn somewhat the same way if we preserve the attitude of respect and love and wonder that must be brought to language and literature. It is true—and students must be aware of this truth—that language well used is not only important for dreamers and poets, but for every man who will make himself understood for any purpose or who will become of significance among other men, who wishes to be remembered. The students you succeed with, the students for whom you help make the past alive so they have a heritage of letters and are not obliged to begin over in either spirit or craft, the students for whom you help make the present vivid and personal and real through familiarity with great minds and through intelligent observation of the world around them—these students will make the literature of the future if we are to have one.

Best Student Poetry and Prose

Once more, early in 1958, the *Bulletin* will publish some of the best poetry and prose written by Illinois junior high school and senior high school students. This is your invitation to submit selected writing of your students.

Please observe these regulations carefully.

1. This year the choices will be made by members of the English departments of Millikin and Normal. Please send *prose* manuscripts to Professor Herbert Hiatt, English Department, Illinois State Normal University, Normal, Illinois. Send *poetry* manuscripts to Professor Ruth Maxwell, English Department, James Millikin University, Decatur, Illinois.

2. Typed copy is preferred, but not absolutely essential. Send manuscripts first class. No manuscripts will be returned unless you enclose an addressed envelope of sufficient size and with first class postage affixed.

3. Each teacher is requested to send no more than five pieces of prose or ten poems.

4. It is permissible to send a school publication if you wish. If you do so, it will be helpful if you mark the selections you want considered. If both prose and poetry are included in the same publication, it will be necessary to send one copy to Professor Hiatt, another to Professor Maxwell.

5. Do not hesitate to send writing by your seventh, eighth, and ninth graders. The student's year in school will be considered by the judges, so that seventh graders, for instance, will not be competing with twelfth graders. Any writing done in 1957 is admissible.

6. If possible, send the manuscripts no later than December 20 (to give the judges a way to spend Christmas vacation). January 10 is the final deadline; no piece received after that date can be considered.

7. At the *end* of each paper, include the necessary identification in exactly this form:

JEANNE JACOBS, sophomore, Exville High School
George Anderson, teacher

8. Before mailing, check with each student to be sure the work is original. Enclose with the manuscripts a statement to this effect: To the best of my knowledge the enclosed manuscripts were written by the students whose names they bear.

Minnesota Sleighride

Heigh-ho! Heigh-ho! A-sleighing we will go! Thanksgiving in Minnesota, with the NCTE. (On sober thought, though, there usually isn't any snow on the ground in Minneapolis in November. Not much, anyhow. But nobody is promising.)

The NCTE convention will this year put special stress on the application of new linguistic knowledge, American literature, and English in a changing world. There'll be sessions for everybody's interest, though—world literature, problems of beginning teachers, superior students, mass communication, group guidance, audio-visual aids, art and literature, the school library, children's writing, and many more.

The dates—November 28, 29, 30. The place—Hotel Leamington, Minneapolis. For further information, see your NCTE October magazine or write to NCTE, 704 S. Sixth Street, Champaign.

The 1958 convention is slated for Pittsburgh; 1959 for Denver; and 1960, the extra-big Golden Anniversary number, for Chicago.

See you in Minneapolis? Pittsburgh? Denver? Chicago?

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